

# Pipelines, Protectors, and a Sense of Place: Media Representations of the Dakota Access Pipeline Protest

By  
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Katie Grote  
B.A., Northern State University, 2016

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Chair: Dr. Jay T. Johnson

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Dr. Joseph Brewer

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Dr. Barney Warf

Date Defended: 29 March 2019

The thesis committee for Katie Grote certifies that this is the  
approved version of the following thesis:

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Chair: Dr. Jay T. Johnson

Date Approved: 29 March 2019

## Abstract

Indigenous resistance to the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) garnered national and international media attention in 2016 as thousands gathered near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in protest. Increased media attention spurred enquiry concerning the representation of the Indigenous peoples leading the movement. The majority of the U.S. population is ill-informed about historical and contemporary issues concerning Indigenous peoples; this limited understanding of Indigenous experience is manifest in news outlets and their audiences' knowledge of current issues impacting Indigenous peoples. This research employs a qualitatively-based content analysis of 80 news articles reporting on the DAPL protest. These articles range in political bias and can be categorized in one of the following groups: Conservative Bias, Liberal Bias, Mainstream News, Local News, and Indigenous News. Commonly occurring codes and themes are analyzed across each category. Word count and frequency of reporting are also considered to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the media representations as they develop through time. While the non-Indigenous-led media commonly cites water security and destruction of sacred sites as the reasons for protest, the Indigenous led media also cites treaty rights, tribal sovereignty, economic vulnerability, climate change, and colonial history more frequently, indicating a more holistic understanding of the movement and the Indigenous experience. The mainstream of U.S. reporting on the DAPL protests perpetuate settler ignorance concerning the daily struggles of Indigenous Americans by ignoring the associated political and economic realities of these communities.

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## **Introduction**

The primary motivation for this research is based on my personal geography. As a born-and raised-South Dakotan, I have intimately watched the settler-colonial perceptions of the Indigenous other in the Dakotas. While inequality between Indigenous peoples and settlers is very common on a national and global scale, the inequality in the Dakotas is very stark not only because of ethnic and cultural differences but also class differences. Based on my personal experience, the socioeconomic inequality amplifies the othering of Indigenous peoples. Inequality and the stereotypical perceptions of Indigenous peoples in the Dakotas have sparked my interest for many years and have inspired various research projects throughout my undergraduate and graduate career.

In my first month as a graduate student at the University of Kansas, the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) protest gained momentum in 2016. As I read about and watched thousands of people – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous – gather in solidarity, I felt as though the timing of the event and my search for a research topic was more than a simple coincidence. The movement centered on the Lakota, the Indigenous peoples with whom I am most familiar. It is also centered upon a familiar geography and brings together environmental, social, and political issues. By addressing media representations of the movement, both from an Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspective, I hoped to address one small aspect of varying perceptions and, perhaps, inequality.

Social movement scholarship focuses on the resources and discourses that attempt to create social transformations. While there is scholarship on a variety of social movements such as the Arab Spring (Roberts 2014), Occupy Wall Street (Gerbaudo and Treré 2015; Barker 2012), and the Sunflower Movement (Chen, Ping, and Chen 2015), this work will focus on Indigenous-led social movements. Therefore, it is necessary to review existing literature of

Indigenous resistance, specifically the spatiality and internationalization of movements and the role that media plays in this spatial expansion. If social transformation is the general goal of social movements, Indigenous movements are a particularly interesting subgenre of social movement scholarship. Due to colonial histories, Indigenous peoples are often marginalized so their contestation of societally oppressive norms luminates subaltern perspectives. Indigenous resistance is not a new phenomenon. Hanna et al. (2016, 490) state, “Protests to claim rights are a common practice among Indigenous peoples of the world, especially when their interests conflict with those of nation states and/or multinational corporations regarding the use of their lands and resources.” By engaging larger publics and institutions in protest, Indigenous peoples have the opportunity to construct new relations and social practices (A. Feldman 2002).

According to some scholars, the spatiality of social movements can act as a symbolic resource that aids in social transformation. Space may be both the product and producer of social relations, but the most important thing to note is that the two cannot be severed. Feldman (2002, 33) writes, “Space serves as more than just a backdrop for the stage upon which social action and social change are enacted, but constitutes a dynamic, imaginative and practical resource in the contexts of mobilization.” Furthermore, the dimension of space has often been overlooked in scholarship surrounding social movements. It is important to bring this geographic lens into the scholarship because people must occupy space in order to command recognition. While physical space is important, there is also an importance to imaginative space in which “an emotional, psychological and intellectual space of freedom” is created (A. Feldman 2002, 36). This imaginative space may be constructed through the emergence of collective identities that often accompany social movements. In the case of Indigenous movements, imaginative space has partially been created through the expansion of international organizations and networks.



The new era of Indigenous resistance rapidly expanded in the mid-twentieth century as Indigenous peoples resisted the colonial legacies that produced ongoing civic and institutional erasure and oppression of Indigenous peoples. Feldman (2002, 34) states, “Pressed to near eradication, indigenous peoples demanded the recognition of their inherent sovereignty and self-determination rights, as peoples and nations rather than minority populations.” This new era of Indigenous resistance – including movements such as A.I.M. and Idle No More – initiated collaboration on a global scale. After years of frustration, civil rights struggles such as Red Power activism and International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) – founded in Standing Rock – gained global activist momentum (Larsen and Johnson 2017). As IITC gained consultative status with the United Nations, the global network of Indigenous resistance expanded. Feldman (2002) and other scholars argue that this global organization support helped strengthen the collective identity of Indigenous peoples who were newly motivated to maximize their resources in order to advance their sovereignty and self-determination (Hardin and Askew 2016). Larsen and Johnson (2017, 7) write, “At the heart of Indigenous activism, then, is the defense of place-based autonomies against settler-state dispossession and oppression.” Globalized activism resulted in increased networks of Indigenous peoples, expanding past the local and connecting diverse peoples with a common history of oppression and common interests of liberation. However, Indigenous activism and steps toward social change do not solely take place in conference rooms and face-to-face gatherings, technological advancements allow for a new space to be inhabited by activists – cyberspace.

Recently, connections among dispersed peoples have also included Internet media platforms that work to collaborate and spread knowledge among a community of Indigenous activists (Hardin and Askew 2016). While media acts as an organizational and communication

tool among global Indigenous peoples, it also gives visibility and, some scholars argue, broader social legitimacy to a wider audience (Hanna, Langdon, and Vanclay 2016). While some scholars question the effectiveness of protest actions – generally concluding that polarization is not beneficial to a cause – Hanna et al. (2016) deem Indigenous protest actions as a legitimate space for the expression of dissent, particularly when existing channels for dialogue do not exist. They use the case study of the National Indigenous Mobilization held in Brazil in 2014 and draw on performance theory to examine how Indigenous peoples use protest actions and social media outlets to broadcast their messages of struggle to a larger audience. The same is true with the case of opposition to the various proposed transcontinental Alberta Oil Sands Pipelines. McNeill and Thornton (2017) study the role of online petitions in protests against three pipelines stemming from the Alberta Oil Sands in Canada. They note that cyberactivist tactics – including online petitions, protest websites, and alternative media – may create a “glocalized” community “wherein local intensity and global extensity are combined” (McNeill and Thornton 2017, 1280). Cyberactivist tactics are often far reaching and can change the dynamic among those involved in a movement. Bennet and Segerberg suggest that the Internet age creates a logic of connective rather than traditional collective action. The former is based on “personalized content sharing across media networks” instead of the collective identity building associated with highly organized and often localized social movements (Bennet and Segerberg 2011, 739). While there is much to be learned about the role of the Internet in social movements, McNeill and Thornton help shed light on a small aspect of cyberactivism, namely online petitions. In their article, the reason for each of the signatories’ actions was analyzed and while many of those reasons may have been tied to Indigenous issues, the article fails to accentuate the Indigenous perspective on these movements. Therefore, scholarship focusing on cyberactivist tactics related to Indigenous

social issues should be expanded. Particularly because social media and alternative media can be a valuable tool for Indigenous movements when mainstream media representations portray Indigenous activists in a negative way (Hanna, Langdon, and Vancley 2016).

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's opposition to the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline is a significant example of Indigenous resistance. A close look at the protest shows a collection of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples connecting over a common affect for a variety of reasons, including the protection of water, Native sovereignty, environmental racism, climate change, women's rights and more. The substantial support that Standing Rock received created visibility on a world stage of the ongoing disregard of Indigenous rights, in this case, for an aggressive pursuit of fossil fuel expansion (Bunten 2017). Bunten (2017) notes that before the DAPL protest was pushed into the international spotlight, all-too-common Indigenous environmental battles went unnoticed. Standing Rock's collection of 4,000 Indigenous peoples from over 280 tribes is a historical marker of cross-tribal and international collaboration (Hardin and Askew 2016). However, due to how recently these events have occurred – and possibly to the politically charged nature of the movement – peer-reviewed scholarly sources on the DAPL protests are few but growing in number. Recent scholarly works include Kyle Powys Whyte's (2017) article "The Dakota Access Pipeline, Environmental Injustice, and U.S. Colonialism," which provides a valuable event summary and, as the title indicates, relates the movement to settler colonialism. Elizabeth Ann Kronk Warner's (2017) article, "Environmental Justice: A Necessary Lens to Effectively View Environmental Threats to Indigenous Survival" provides a legal lens on the movement, and Zoltán Grossman's (2017) book *Unlikely Alliances* has a section dedicated to the alliances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous rural residents opposing the Dakota Access Pipeline. Some of the sources used in this paper come from online journals and

sources that provide an important Indigenous perspective and, as previously mentioned, it is vital to explore cross-cultural perspectives in academic research.

Pipelines, Protectors, and a Sense of Place: Media Representations of the Dakota  
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Co-Author: Jay T. Johnson

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## Introduction

Resource exploitation and land loss born from colonial policies are a harsh reality for many Indigenous peoples globally. This mistreatment is often accompanied by powerful reactions as Indigenous peoples fight against those oppressing Indigenous rights and livelihoods. However unending and exhausting the struggle may be, recent decades have born a response referred to as ‘grassroots globalization.’ This type of movement is created by marginalized groups at the local scale but seeks alliances at national and global scales as a response to their exclusion from environmental decision making (Routledge 2003, 334). The Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) protest is just one example of an array of Indigenous-led grassroots globalization. Similar forms of grassroots globalization can be seen among diverse groups of Indigenous peoples, including the Native Hawaiian protest of the construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope on Mauna Kea (Quirk 2017), Quichua, Achuar, and Shiwiar peoples in Ecuador resisting crude oil extraction (Sawyer 2004), and the Māori peoples working with environmental activists to protest offshore oil exploration in Aotearoa/New Zealand (T. O’Brien 2013). Despite this virtually constant and cyclical narrative, the majority of settler populations are ill-informed on the issues and their impacts on Indigenous peoples.

While the term “Indigenous” is generally accepted and often preferred by academics and Indigenous peoples – the latter of which will be discussed in greater detail in this paper – the term “settler” may also benefit from elaboration. Academia has produced an entire genre of settler colonial studies to analyze the unequal relationship between Indigenous peoples and their non-Indigenous counterpart, generally referred to as settlers (Veracini 2015). The term “settler” is often used synonymously with “migrant,” the former of which is defined as *any* individual or community that permanently resides in a particular locale and the latter of which applies to *all*

individuals or communities originating from elsewhere (Veracini 2015). Given these definitions, it is understandable why the two would often be used synonymously. However, Veracini insists that they are different. Settlers are beneficiaries while migrants are targeted by assimilatory processes. Veracini insists that the term settlers should be used because of the historical context referring to exclusionary practices of settlers during settler-colonialism. Just as there is a power dynamic difference between settlers and migrants, there is a power dynamic between settlers and Indigenous peoples. Namely, Indigenous peoples have experienced land dispossession, cultural endangerment, and physical massacre under colonial regimes. Although many settlers may not agree with or support this, the fact remains that settlers have not undergone this level of oppression at the hands of the settler-colonial state and thus have a more privileged position. Barker and Pickerill (2012, 1708) write, “While some Settler people may radically confront colonial power, the majority legitimate and benefit from it.” It is this beneficial and privileged position of settlers – which, in the case of this paper, most of the settler population is of European decent – that creates a distinction between settlers and Indigenous peoples and, therefore, aids in the erasure of Indigenous peoples, histories, and issues.

Settler ignorance on issues of profound importance to Indigenous peoples is a barrier that is apparent in settler education systems. In Canada, Anne Godlewska (2013, 216–17) surveyed first-year and fourth-year university students on their knowledge of issues of profound importance to Indigenous peoples in Canada. The quiz results were poor, as first-year students averaged 29%, fourth-year students averaged 35%, and students graduating to be teachers averaged 37%. Although apathy at an individual scale may certainly be a factor of settler ignorance, the settler education system is also a culprit in perpetuating such ignorance. In the U.S. specifically, primary and secondary education often enables Eurocentric narratives that lack

complexity and exclude subaltern voices from U.S. history. Blaut (1993, 6) states, “Textbooks are an important window into a culture; more than just books, they are semiofficial statements of exactly what the opinion-forming elite of the culture want the educated youth of the culture to believe to be true about the past and present world.” A study of Indigenous representation in U.S. K-12 history standards reveals that Indigenous peoples are often cast as outsiders. Furthermore, the majority of cited history related to Indigenous peoples is confined to the pre-1900 era and neglects the complex Indigenous history after 1900, depicting Indigenous peoples as existing in the past without a strong standing in the present (Shear et al. 2015). This erasure runs contrary to the fact Indigenous peoples make up approximately 1.7% of the U.S. population today (Norris, Vines, and Hoeffel 2012). Indigenous peoples are not relics of a distant past, they are members of the present who have a voice to be heard.

The recent DAPL protest has been a platform for Indigenous voice. The movement began in April 2016 when the Sacred Stone Camp was set up on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in order to show their opposition to the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline under Lake Oahe, the reservoir where the tributary Cannonball River meets the Missouri River. The Dakota Access Pipeline, a project of Energy Transfer Partners, is a \$3.8 billion project that stretches 1,172 miles from the Bakken shale oil fields in North Dakota to riverports in Illinois, where it may bring as much as 570,000 barrels of crude oil to markets in the U.S. Midwest and the Gulf Coast daily (R. Johnson 2017). The protest movement gained momentum beginning in September 2016 as news spread and the number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies increased, with the camps eventually hosting thousands. The on-ground movement is generally referred to as the DAPL protest but there was also a significant social media movement throughout Facebook and Twitter generally referred to as #NoDAPL; both the physical and



cyber movements included many in solidarity uttering the famous phrase, “I Stand with Standing Rock.” As the movement garnered national and international media attention, the Indigenous peoples leading the movement become the subject of stories written and read by the previously mentioned ill-informed settler populations. How the mainstream media frames the DAPL story and how it interprets what the Indigenous community is saying is crucial to the amplification of Indigenous voice. This research analyzes Indigenous and non-Indigenous news outlets to find how the DAPL protest is represented to a generally well-informed Indigenous audience and a generally ill-informed non-Indigenous audience, how non-Indigenous media portrays what Indigenous activists are saying, and how media represents issues of profound importance to Indigenous peoples such as treaties, land disputes, and relationship to place.

### Methodology

The primary method of this research involves a content analysis of various media representations of the recent Indigenous-led DAPL protest. This content analysis is qualitatively-based; it takes the traditional technique of quantifying textual data (Cope 2016) and relates the ideas and meanings found in the text to literature, social and cultural contexts, and the research questions (Berg 2008; Craine and Gardner 2016). This deeper understanding of the data is referred to as latent content analysis by Berg (2008) and allows for a cross coding of print media and academic literature.

The media representations utilized in this study are from publicly available online news sources; the data is primarily composed of written news articles but also includes several transcribed televised news reports. The media representations come from different areas of the political spectrum, including conservative, liberal, minimal partisan bias – referred to throughout

this paper as *Mainstream* – as well as two non-politically aligned categories, including local news and Indigenous media. The publications and their subsequent news category are provided in Table 1. The ideological terms liberal and conservative are used to describe a horde of political issues, party platforms, political candidates, and individual people. The selection of publications for the politically aligned categories was guided by Vanessa Otero’s Media Bias Chart (2017). Otero explains political or partisan bias as represented by policy positions rather than individual people. An example may be the preference for taxes to be higher/the same/lower on the wealthy, these generally coincide with a liberal/centrist/conservative policy position rather than individual people, such as journalists or politicians (Otero 2018).

<b>Liberal Bias</b>	Democracy Now!
	Huffington Post
	MSNBC
	Occupy Democrats
<b>Mainstream</b>	Al Jazeera
	CNBC
	CNN
	New York Times
	Wall Street Journal
	Washington Post
<b>Conservative Bias</b>	Daily Wire
	Fox News
	The Examiner
	The Federalist
	The Washington Times
<b>Local</b>	Argus Leader
	Bismarck Tribune
<b>Indigenous</b>	Indian Country Today
	Indianz.com
	National Native News
	Native News Online
	News from Indian Country

Table 1

Using the terms liberal or conservative can, at times, be subjective partially because the definition of what is liberal or conservative can change, topics can be too binary to have a center policy position, and not everyone will agree on a definition. However, it is a useful continuum to employ in this research. The spectrum is divided into sections including neutral – indicating minimal partisan bias or a balance of biases – skews liberal/conservative, hyper-partisan liberal/conservative, and most extreme liberal/conservative. Although it may ignore other dimensions or political positions – for example, libertarianism – the political spectrum is supported by the force of the two-party system in U.S. politics. The bias of each publication is

scored on a rubric via three categories, topic selection and/or presentation, sentence metrics, and comparison with other known articles about a subject. Furthermore, bias can be expressed either by political position or linguistic expression (Otero 2018). All of these indicators are considered in Otero's placement of publications in the Media Bias Chart (Otero 2017). Several publications were selected from the chart based on their general distribution on the political bias spectrum. Additionally, the non-politically aligned categories are defined either by scale – specifically, a publication defined by close proximity to the movement – or topic/audience – specifically, a publication defined by a primarily non-settler/Indigenous audience. Due to these parameters, the selection process involved comparatively few publications from which to choose.

The coverage timeframe was from April 1, 2016 to March 31, 2017. The start date of coverage was selected because it marks the establishment of the first protest camps. The end date marks an approximate time since the first camps were established and is shortly after those camps were evacuated, thus effectively ending the on-ground movement at the construction site. Articles were chosen using several databases as well as publication-specific archives. Initially, the scope of article and publication selections attempted to remain within the databases subscribed to by the University of Kansas – specifically, ProQuest Global Newsstream and Access World News – however, due to the wide range of publications many articles were selected via publication-specific archives available to the public without subscription. The search term “Dakota access pipeline” was deployed within the coverage timeframe and articles were reviewed and selected during three subsequent timeframes within the movement – first coverage (approximately April to September), climax coverage (end of November to early December), end coverage (approximately end of February to early March).

Individual articles served as the unit of analysis and were chronologically ordered and assigned one of the five previously mentioned categories – *Liberal Bias*, *Mainstream*, *Conservative Bias*, *Local News*, and *Indigenous News*. The 80 articles selected covering the DAPL protest were then assessed for word count and length and then coded to find reoccurring themes – including the cited reasons for opposition to the pipeline – and quotation and paraphrased source attributions. This analysis aims to assess the divergence in Indigenous-led and non-Indigenous-led news coverage of the movement. My interest in this research is sparked by being raised as a settler in South Dakota, watching and experiencing the settler-colonial perceptions resulting in Indigenous “othering.” I found myself wishing to hear more Indigenous voices.

## Results and Discussion

### Timeline

What began as a small grassroots movement near the Missouri River soon flourished into a nationally and even globally recognized cause. While it is difficult to pinpoint the true beginning and end of the resistance against the Dakota Access Pipeline, a timeline may benefit our understanding of the movement. Figure 1 is a representative timeline of reporting on the movement. It is representative because it does not include all of the news publications used in this research, rather a handful of publications from each news category. The publications from each category are as follows: Liberal – *The Huffington Post*, *MSNBC* (TV); Mainstream – *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Al Jazeera*, *Wall Street Journal*; Conservative – *The Examiner*, *The Daily Wire*; Local – *Bismarck Tribune*, *Argus Leader*; Indigenous – *Indian Country Today*, *National Native News*, *News from Indian Country*. One of the reasons for this

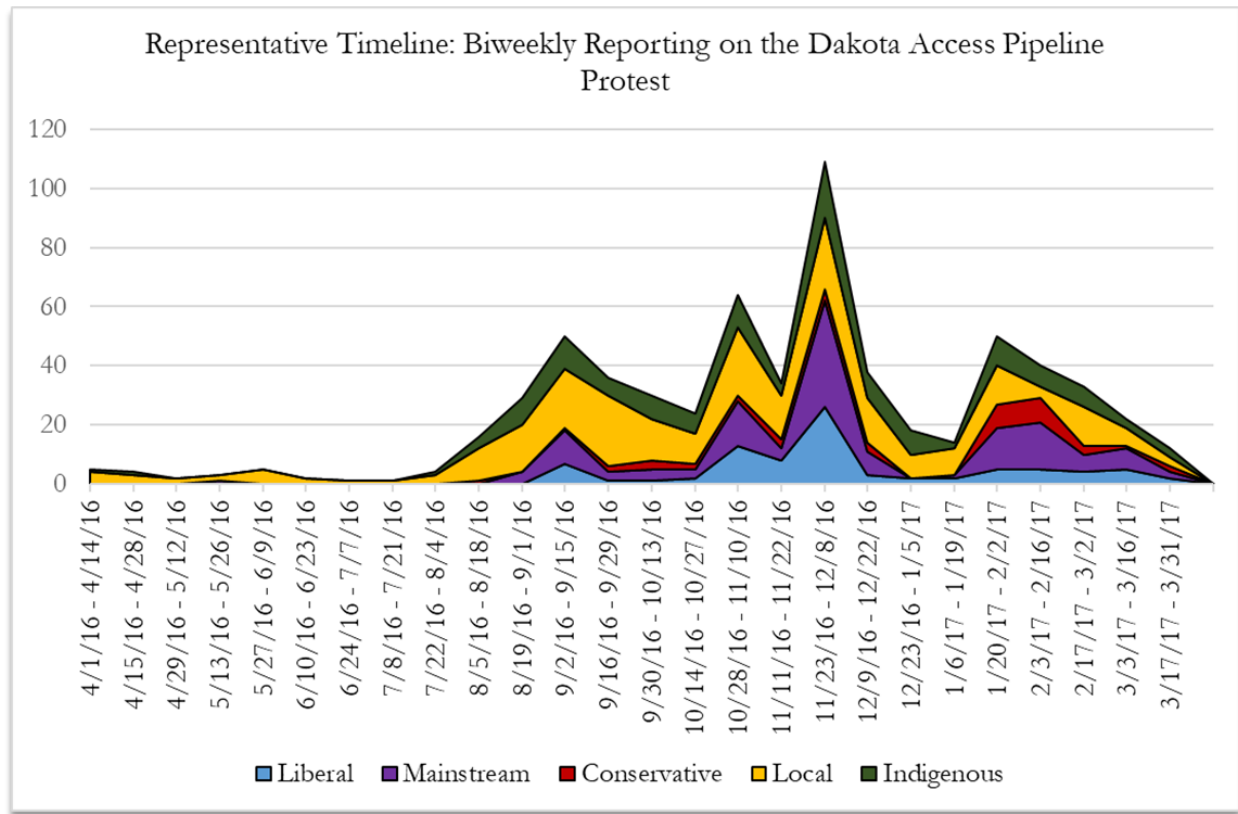


Figure 1: Representative timeline of biweekly reporting on the #NoDAPL movement

“representative timeline” is the difficulty and labor-intensive act of extracting these dates from numerous websites with often vastly different interfaces. Although several totals were extracted from search engines such as Proquest Global Newsstream and Access World News, not every publication used in this research was able to be accessed through these search engines. Of the selected publications, the local *Bismarck Tribune* was the most prolific, with a total of 232 articles (and editorials) mentioning the Dakota Access Pipeline within the timeframe, more than three times the next most prolific source. The local newspapers and Indigenous news sources were some of the earliest to report on the movement, first publishing on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016 as the movement manifested and grew. Although technically outside the timeframe of interest, it is worth noting that the *Indian Country Today Media Network* published several articles related to

the Dakota Access Pipeline in March, 2016 – almost a month before the first camps were established.

The timeline shows several spikes in reporting rates, particularly from September 2 to September 15, 2016; October 28 to November 10, 2016; November 23 to December 8, 2016; and, finally, January 20 to February 2, 2017. These spikes align well with major events within the movement. The first rise in reporting covers the swelling interest in the movement and the initial confrontations between parties involved including reports of clashes between private security guards and activists, as well as North Dakota Governor Jack Dalrymple's call to activate the National Guard. This two-week period also spans the same time period as the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's claim that the construction of the pipeline demolished sacred sites, a temporary halt to the construction, and, subsequent denial to continue the cessation of construction activities. The second spike in reporting is unique in this timeframe as it does not coincide with any particularly noteworthy local events, but with the national scale activities related to the 2016 presidential elections. After Donald Trump's presidential election victory, the hopes of the pipeline opponents became more uncertain as the Trump campaign had shown support for the pipeline construction.

The third, and most substantial, rise in reporting comes between November 23 and December 8. Just before this biweekly period, activists gathered in protest and were met by militarized law enforcement with tear gas and water cannons in freezing temperatures. A few days later, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced an evacuation deadline for the main camp – Oceti Sakowin – on December 5, followed by an evacuation order issued by Gov. Dalrymple, citing concerns over harsh weather conditions. This biweekly period also includes a November 30 announcement that a group of thousands of U.S. veterans would deploy to

Standing Rock over the next several days to act as human shields between the water protectors and law enforcement while the evacuation deadline loomed. Whether by correlation or causation, this is followed by a momentary victory for the pipeline opponents as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers denied Energy Transfer Partners' request for an easement to move forward with construction beneath the Missouri River. The final rise in reporting from January 20<sup>th</sup> to February 2, 2017 coincides with Trump's inauguration and his executive order to move forward with the Dakota Access Pipeline and Keystone XL Pipeline construction projects, effectively ending the on-ground protest of the Dakota Access Pipeline.

As previously mentioned, the *Indigenous* and *Local* publications were the first to report on the DAPL protest and they were also consistent with their coverage. The *Mainstream* publications seemed to report more often during the previously mentioned peaks. In comparison, the *Liberal* and *Conservative* bias publications fluctuated more in their reporting on the movement. While the *Liberal* publications reported more often than the *Conservative*, the bulk of their articles were during significant times of conflict, and there is a stagnation of reporting after the denial of the easement. In fact, Figure 1 shows that the *Liberal* publications do not significantly contribute to the reporting spike coinciding with Trump's executive order on January 24, 2017. The *Conservative* publications seem to have the inverse effect in their reporting. The most significant contribution to articles on the movement by *Conservative* media comes with the signing of the executive order and the weeks following. They have a consistently low number of articles published during the rest of the movement, including the peak times of conflict. This may be attributed to where their political support lies, as the *Liberal* reports more often and consistently on alleged human rights violations and victories for the water protectors and the *Conservative* reports spike during the victory for the pipeline proponents.

## Word Counts

As a preliminary analysis, the assessment of average word counts may provide insight into how much space a publication provides for this topic and the specific words used in each category – *Conservative Bias*, *Mainstream*, *Liberal Bias*, *Local News*, *Indigenous News*. Figure 2 shows that the *Mainstream* category consisted of reporting with the highest word counts with the *Indigenous* news reports following close behind. Perhaps the more intriguing analysis is found in counts of specific words rather than total words. The widespread Indigenous-led opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline raises an interesting question about identity and how identity is represented within reporting. Many of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples present at the camps preferred to be called ‘water protectors.’ Not only does the term ‘protector’ have a more

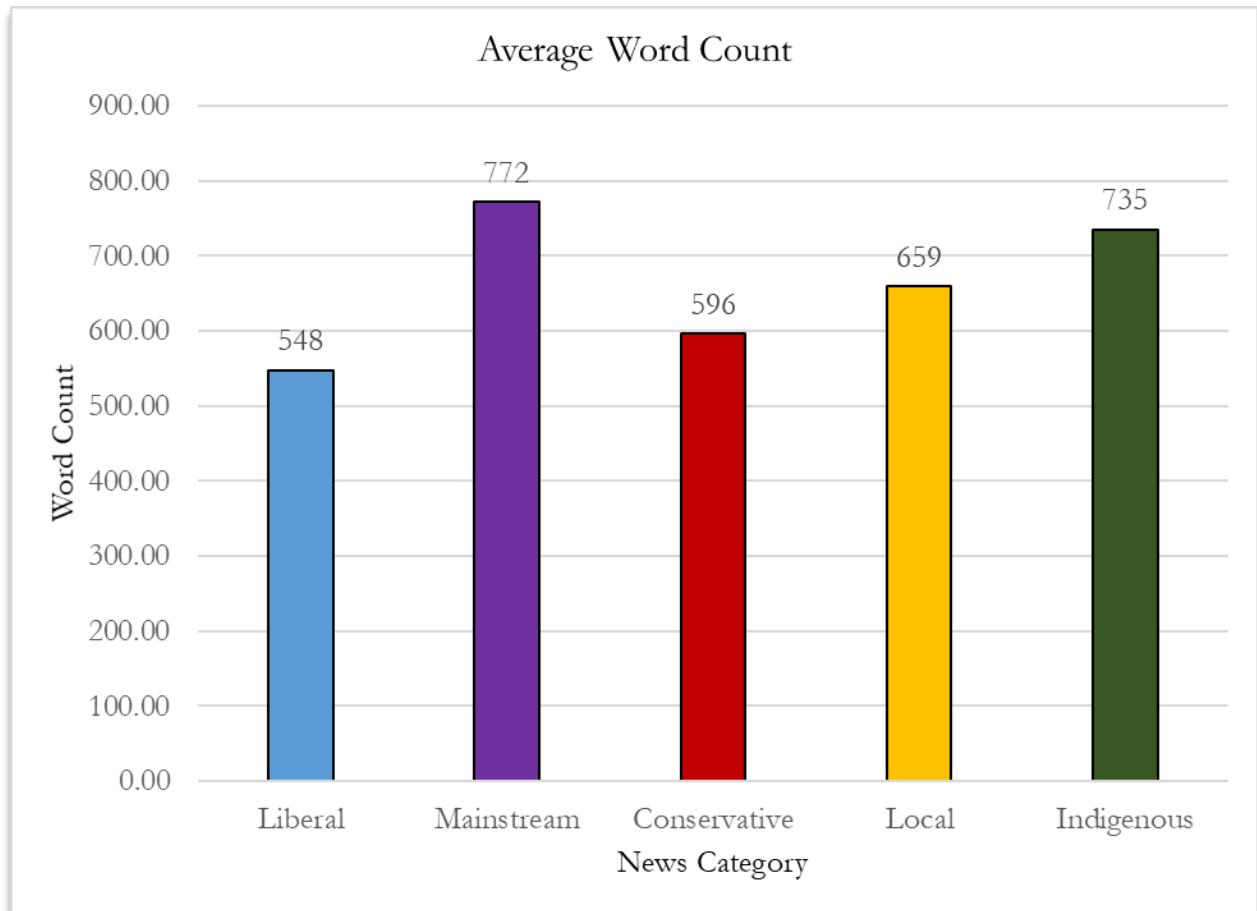


Figure 2: Average word count from each news category



positive connotation than the term ‘protester,’ particularly in an increasingly politically divided era, the term ‘protector’ is also tied to Indigenous ontology. One of the Indigenous news documents (Perkins 2016) states,

Most people just don’t understand why today’s water protectors don’t like being labeled as “protestors” because they are confused about the concept of protecting the earth. This is a direct result of using the English language to convey their message, it is in essence “the real world” vs. “the sacred earth.” In the real world, we are taught from birth thru schooling that the earth is a natural resource to be managed or property to be owned thru the system. This is in opposition to the indigenous concept of the sacred earth which can never be owned, where we relate to the earth as our relative and honor that connection by way of life and in ceremonies.

This sentiment is echoed by Johnson and Larsen (2013), who observed that Indigenous worldviews conceive of the earth and natural world through reciprocal relationships with place and with non-human beings. The Lakota peoples believe in the reciprocity of all life forms and that all forms of the animate and inanimate world are related. Every living thing was designed for a purpose and deserves respect (Wildcat 2009). This difference in understanding has contributed to the divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups and is apparent in the disconnect in discourses, including those found within the various media representations. Western formalizations of place have been rooted in binary logic and a Cartesian conceptualization separating the human from the non-human and glorifying human dominance over the non-human.

The data shows that the Indigenous preferred identification of protector is not commonly utilized in reporting. In fact, the word protester/or/s is used 264 times in the 80 reviewed articles, nearly five times more than the 53 references to the word protector/s – with the majority of these citations in the *Indigenous* and *Liberal* news categories (Figure 3). Although, difference in ontological understanding is certainly a factor in this deviation, non-Indigenous news outlets

may also prefer to use the term ‘protester’ in an attempt to remain seemingly unbiased or show that they are not in solidarity with the protectors. Social movements with expanding networks use emotional bonds and collective identity to ignite solidarity. Bosco (2007, 558) states,

Emotional bonds also permit the generation and sustainability of collective action under difficult conditions (such as an adverse political context) and furthermore, act as a foundation for the formation of collective identities and oppositional consciousness that activists used to define themselves both to each other and to the world outside.

Considering this while also noting the previously stated evidence that the regular use of the term ‘water protector’ is primarily present in the *Indigenous* and *Liberal* categories suggests that these news sources seem to associate themselves with or perhaps politically support the protectors because they are willing to promote this term in their publications.

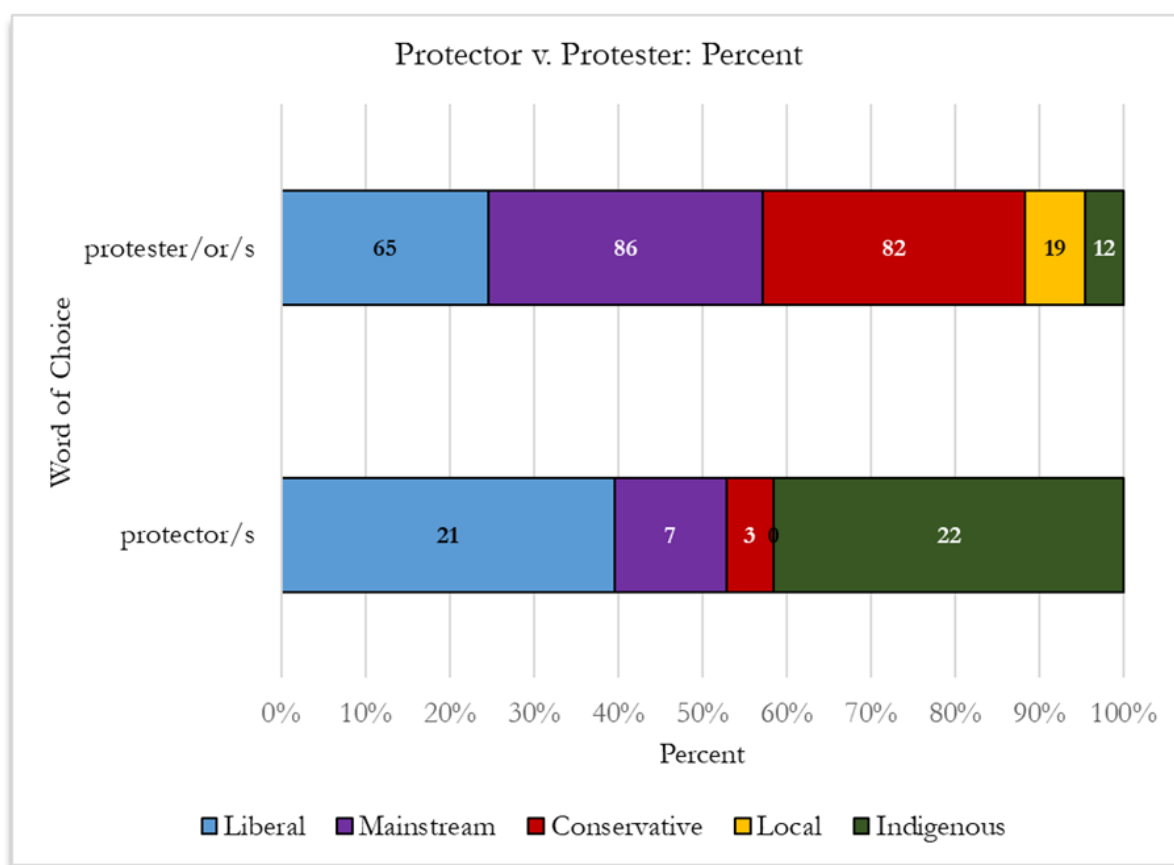


Figure 3: Percentage of word choice and total counts of word choice

Continuing with the theme of preferred identification, this study finds an important disconnect between other identification terms used by Indigenous and non-Indigenous news sources. The identification terms used have significant cultural and political histories. Although each term used is not incorrect, per se, the terms preferred by Indigenous media, and the Standing Rock tribe, show a greater and more holistic understanding of Indigenous culture and politics. As shown in Figure 4, the Indigenous-led media favors the use of the name *Lakota* rather than *Sioux* when referring to the local Indigenous communities of Standing Rock. The non-Indigenous media used *Sioux* (190) over seven times more than the term *Lakota* (27). While the term *Sioux* is not incorrect, it is a French corruption of an Anishinaabe word *Nadouwesou*, meaning “adders,” and used to describe the tribal confederation that includes the Lakota, also

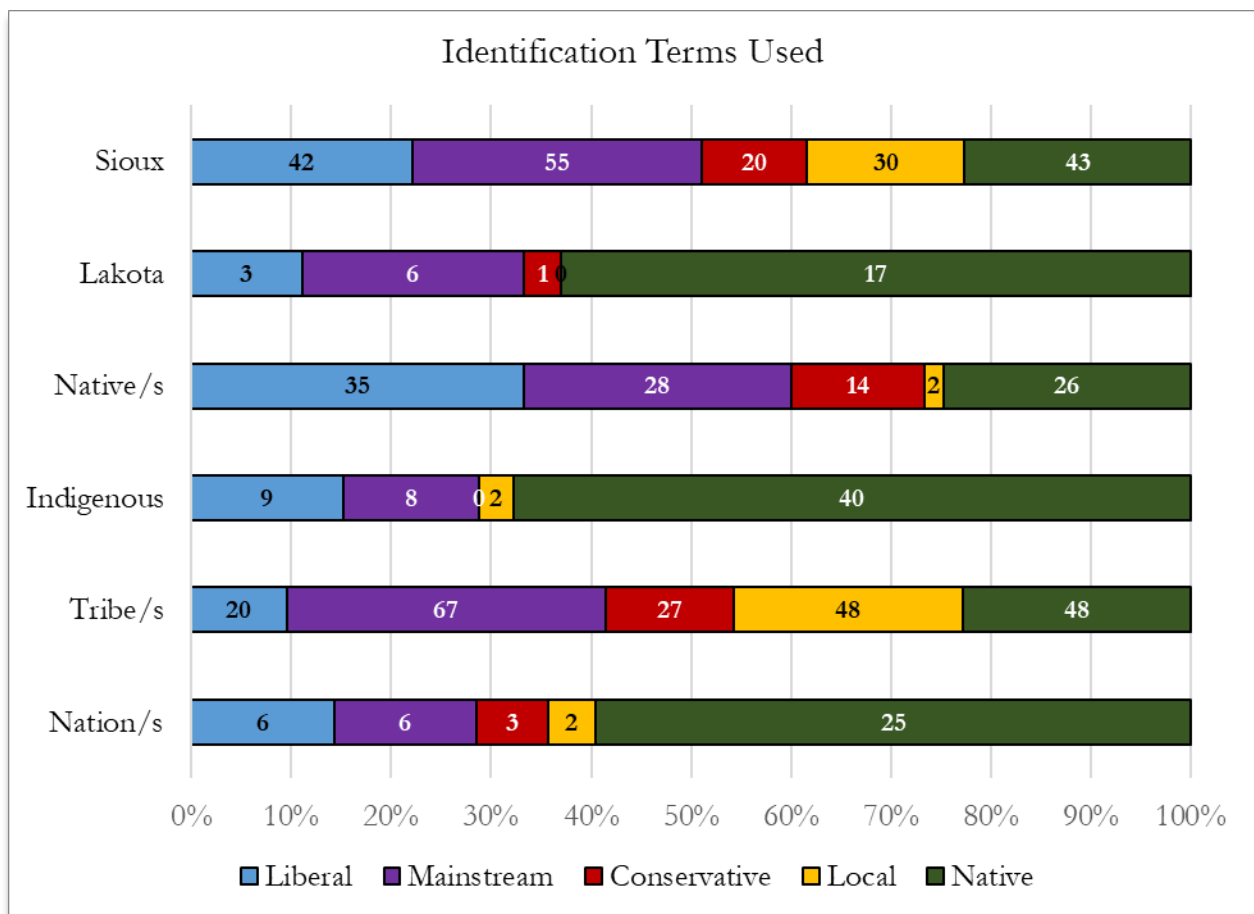


Figure 4: Percentage of terms of identification used in each news category.

known as the Oceti Sakowin Oyate. The Oyate encompasses three major divisions, including Lakota (Western Division), Nakota (Middle Division), and Dakota (Eastern Division).

Furthermore, each of these divisions can be broken down into sub-divisions – such as Teton – and bands – such as Oglala (State Historical Society of North Dakota). While *Sioux* encompasses these divisions – located primarily in modern day North and South Dakota and Minnesota – it also has stronger colonial ties than the more specific identification of the *Lakota* peoples of Standing Rock. (Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, n.d.).

Yet another deviation in identifiers arises between the use of *Indigenous* or *Native*. In all but the *Indigenous* and *Local* media categories, the term *Native* (105) was used nearly twice as often as *Indigenous* (59) and the Indigenous-led media comprised nearly 70% of the total counts of *Indigenous*. The *Local* media only used each term twice. While neither term is incorrect, scale and legality are exemplified by the Indigenous identifier. Preference over generalized identifiers among Indigenous people in the United States has varied over time, but Michael Yellow Bird, in a 1999 study, found that at least among Indigenous students and faculty on university campuses there was a move toward embracing the more internationally recognized term, *Indigenous* (1999). Ronald Niezen (2003, 3) writes, “The term ‘indigenous’...is not only a legal category and an analytical concept but also an expression of identity, a badge worn with pride, revealing something significant and personal about its wearer’s collective attachments.” Indigeneity is consistently correlated with “patterns of conquest, genocide, ethnocide, and political marginalization” (15). These historical recurrences serve as a collective memory and a unifying identity of Indigenous survivors – often on a global scale.

While the terms “nation” and “tribe” are often used interchangeably, the former carries with it the acknowledgement of the previous status of Indigenous nations as sovereign equals to

the United States. While early U.S. documents refer variously to Indigenous groups as ‘nations’, ‘tribes,’ or ‘bands’ depending on the size and strength of the community (see S. O’Brien 1990), many Indigenous communities in the U.S. choose to employ the term nation in observance of their ‘nation to nation’ legal status with the Federal government (Pevar 1992). Even though Federal law relegates tribal nations to a status roughly equivalent to that of the States, tribal governments want to remind Federal authorities of their treaty obligations. Utilizing the term nation then reminds the Federal government of the tribe’s original status as a treaty partner. However, Indigenous communities in the U.S. do not always fit the mold of our understanding of nations. As Vine Deloria Jr. and Clifford Lytle (1984, 1) write,

We like to think of nations on a much larger scale...Indian tribes have some of the attributes we find familiar in other nations; language, religion, and social customs certainly set them apart from other Americans. But we miss the massive crowd of people, the well-developed lands, the military and economic power that we see in larger nations. And so, when the idea of Indian tribes as nations is voiced, many Americans laugh at the pretension, convinced that Indians have some primitive delusion of grandeur that has certainly been erased by history.

While settlers in the U.S. may predominately perceive tribes as small, weak governments, tribes hold firm to their legal and constitutional status by preferring the term nation.

### **Quote and Reference Attribution**

As the media spotlight on the DAPL protest amplified, it should have been accompanied by an increased concern of appropriate Indigenous representation. Due to settler ignorance on issues concerning Indigenous peoples, accurate Indigenous representation requires a platform for Indigenous voice. Tsing (2007) observes that Indigenous *voice* must speak in a way an audience can hear. The movement was covered by various media outlets encompassing and aimed at a wide variation of audiences. However, as is indicated in this section, the representation of

Indigenous voice varies from audience to audience. The major contrast is between the *Conservative* media and the rest of the news categories.

Findings indicate that nearly every news category – with the exception of the *Conservative Bias* – directly quotes or paraphrases the voices of Indigenous water protectors and their allies most often – *Liberal* (29), *Mainstream* (79), *Conservative* (17), *Local* (32), *Indigenous* (44). Indigenous voice is dominant in both the Indigenous and most of the non-Indigenous media representations of the DAPL protest. Comparatively, the pro-pipeline argument, produced by the oil companies and some of the general public, is most often cited in the *Conservative Bias* news – *Liberal* (2), *Mainstream* (21), *Conservative* (24), *Local* (12), *Indigenous* (3). However, Figure 5 does provide some insight into the partiality of the news

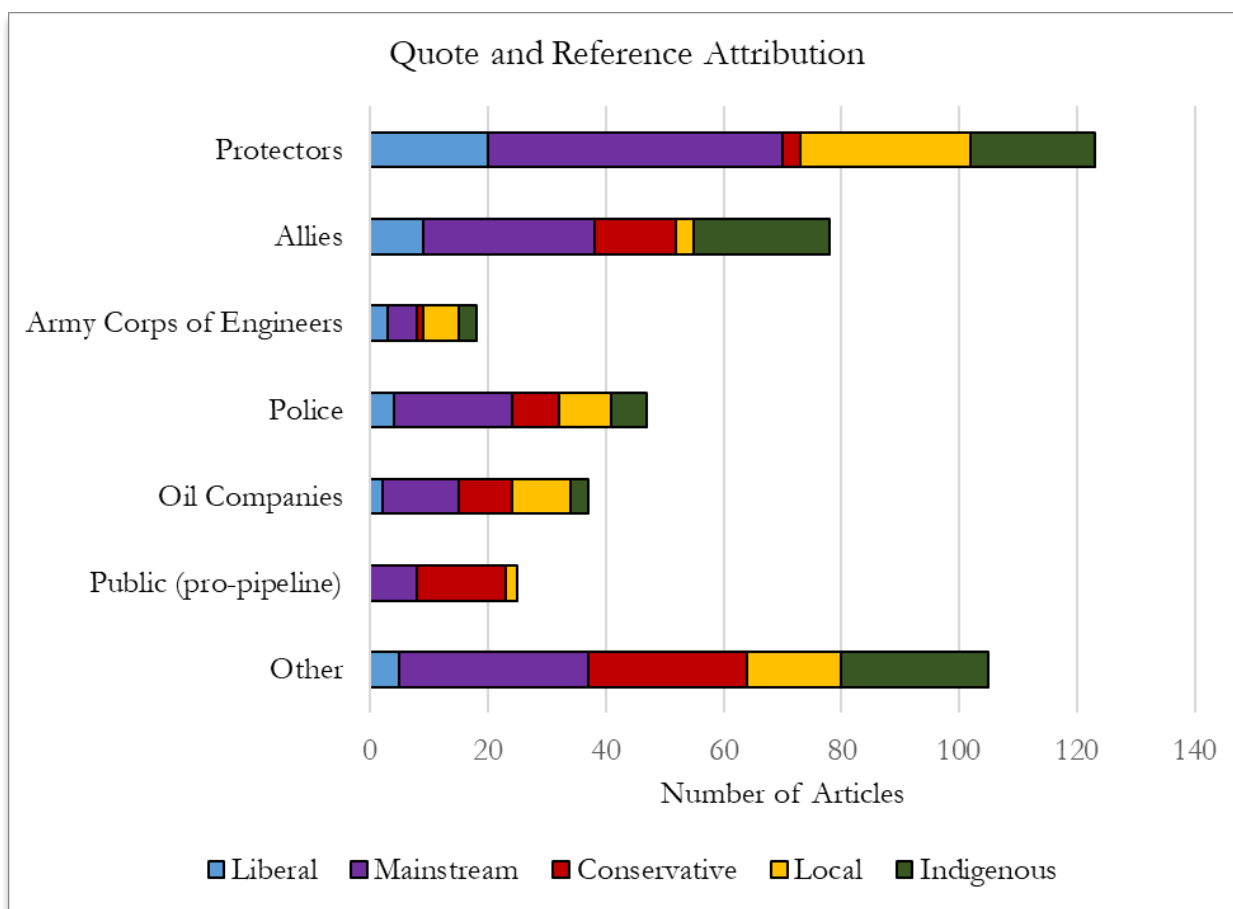


Figure 5: Counts of quotes or paraphrased information from groups used in each news category.

categories as choices are made to either include or exclude certain voices. It may seem as though the pro-pipeline voice is the one being stifled in media representations of the movement; however, colonial history has repeatedly excluded Indigenous voices, therefore, for the Indigenous voice to dominate in this case is truly remarkable and signifies some progress in bridging the general lack of understanding by the general population. One of the reviewed articles (Perkins 2016) reiterates this sentiment, “As attention is drawn away from the media circus of the political and entertainment worlds, and directed increasingly to the environmental crises we find all over the earth, it seems the indigenous voice in America is finally being heard.” While postcolonial theory aims to include the voices of those excluded by dominant forms of knowing, Spivak’s (1994) classic essay contends that the subaltern – collectively marginalized people – cannot truly speak because their voice must be diluted through Western thought, words, and phrases (Sharp 2009). Such a concern is present within Indigenous media coverage as one article (Perkins 2016) observes of the movement, “a critical mistranslation is threatening to undermine the intended message, and inevitably of the end goal.” Despite this colonial-born barrier, the insurgence of Indigenous voice within reporting on the Dakota Pipeline protests is evident, if not fully understood.

### **Reasons for Opposition**

In the 80 articles reviewed, the most commonly cited reasons for the Indigenous-led protest include – from highest to lowest – water security (49), spiritual significance/sacred sites (40), treaty rights (16), tribal sovereignty and recognition (16), economic vulnerability (9), climate change (9), and present manifestations of colonial history (8). Shown in Figure 6, every news category cited water quality and the destruction of sacred sites most often. While these two reasons may have been the most prolifically cited by the activists, overall, Indigenous news

sources had a more holistic representation of the variety of reasons for the tribes' opposition. Thus, indicating a dichotomy between Indigenous and settler representations of the social movement. Settler media tends to ignore more complicated aspects of the movement such as colonial history and treaty rights. In the following paragraphs I will address each of these cited reasons for protest in more detail.

Water appears to be the most prominent issue in the DAPL protest. As a reason for opposition to the pipeline, the protection of water is often cited in the *Mainstream* (16) news category followed by the *Liberal* news (10), *Indigenous* news (9), and *Local* and *Conservative* news (9). There are many reasons why water has become such an important concern – for both

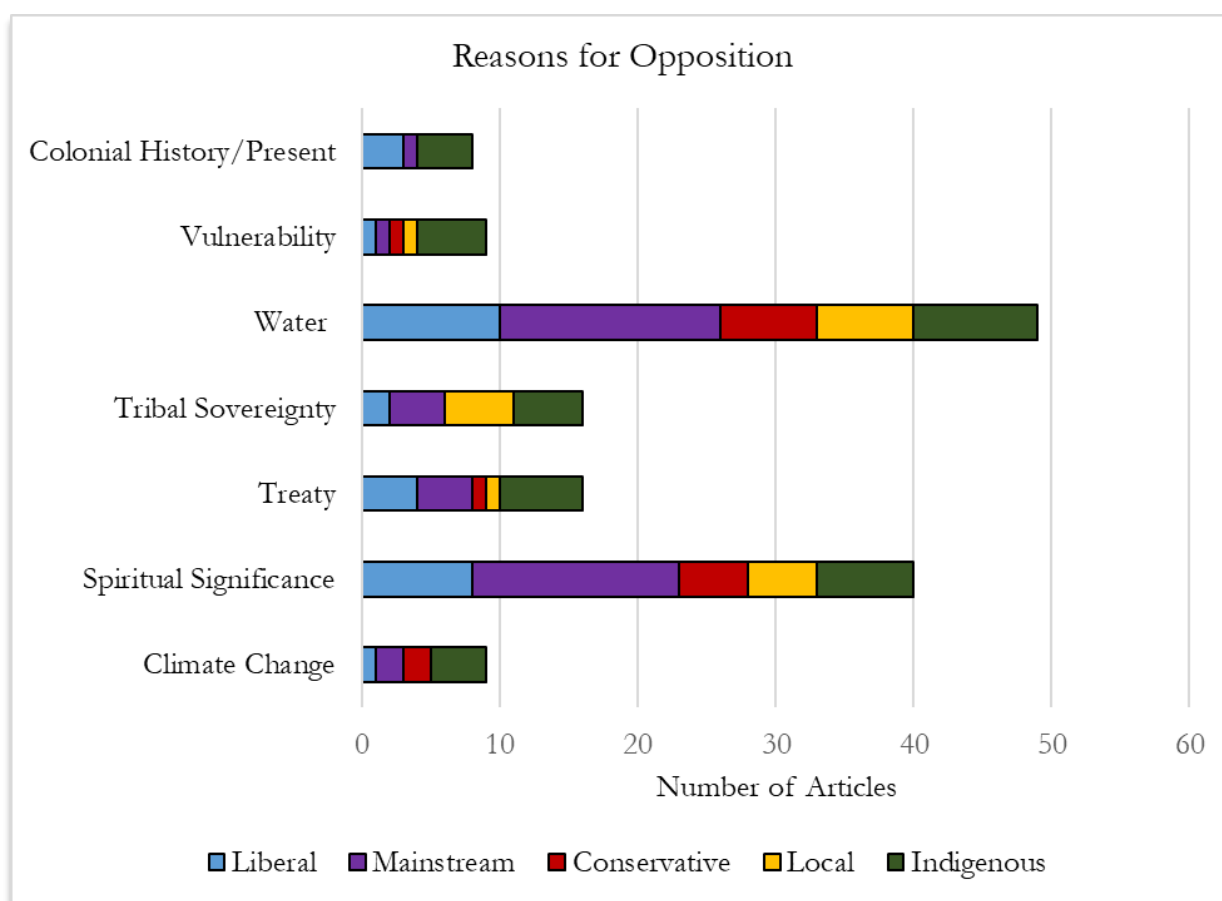


Figure 6: After an analysis of 80 news articles and transcripts related to the #NoDAPL movement, these seven topics were commonly cited as the reason for the opposition to the pipeline, particularly for the Indigenous peoples who started the movement.



Indigenous peoples and settlers – including the intrinsic connection between oil and the pollution of water resources. The reference of water as a resource is, of course, from a Western ontological view, the Indigenous point of view will be discussed next. While both water and oil are important to our daily lives, perhaps one resource should be prioritized above the other. David Lewis Feldman (2012, 1) argues in his book simply titled, *Water*: “Freshwater is our planet’s most precious resource.” While freshwater is naturally scarce – less than 3% of the total global water available is freshwater, and most of that is frozen or inaccessible – human activity makes the situation worse by threatening the freshwater we do have with pollution. Growing populations and standards of living require new food, energy, and product demands be met. In order to achieve these production goals, agriculture, industry, and municipal sectors of the economy overuse or pollute water (Feldman 2012). While this argument is centered on the idea of water as a vital resource, this is not the only reason that water should be protected.

Indigenous ontology considers water through a post-humanist lens. In other words, water is a non-human living entity. It is part of an extended network of kinship, which Indigenous peoples have a responsibility to protect as a part of their reciprocal relationship with all entities of Creation (Wilson and Inkster 2018). This reciprocal relationship is a driving force for increased Indigenous demand for water governance to contrast Western ontologies that view water as a resource able to be exploited (McGregor 2014; Wilson and Inkster 2018). In the movement, the Lakota phrase “Mni Wiconi,” meaning “water is life” or more accurately “water is alive,” became an anthem. From the Indigenous perspective, Valandra (2016) writes, “Western development frames water as a resource and as property: humans can own water and the right to harm water. By contrast, our relationship with water is framed not as possessing rights over water but as protecting the rights of water.” While the argument of respect for ontological

differences may not greatly influence those polluting freshwaters into changing their methods, it is still true that freshwater is vital to sustain living beings, human and non-human, thus it should be a concern of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike. No matter a person's race, ethnicity, or class all human beings have the desire and need for clean, accessible water. The need for water is relatable, therefore it is the most cited reason for opposition to the pipeline.

The spiritual significance of the land and river and the desecration of sacred sites were the second most cited reason that the Lakota peoples were opposing the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. Spiritual significance is cited in every news category as a reflection of the tribe's core legal argument to halt the pipeline construction, invoking legal protections such as those granted by the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). Although Indigenous peoples claimed that the pipeline construction desecrated sacred sites, including burial sites, only 15 of the 40 articles citing spiritual significance also mentioned burial grounds – *Liberal* (1), *Mainstream* (8), *Conservative* (1), *Local* (2), and *Indigenous* (3). This statistic is significant because the desire to preserve burial sites is relatable to Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike. Therefore, it is surprising that the majority of citations simply refer to sacred sites and not burial sites. It may appear odd that the Indigenous media only mentions burial grounds a handful of times, however, considering the more informed audience of this outlet it can be assumed that the readers already have a deep understanding of sacred sites and the citation of burial grounds is not always necessary to invoke empathy. While all audiences understand the significance of burial desecration, non-Indigenous audiences may have difficulty comprehending the significance of sacred sites to Indigenous cultures. Many non-Indigenous peoples do not understand the importance placed on ceremonies, many only at certain locations, and that they are conducted under conditions of privacy (Deloria 1991, 3). Deloria (1991, 6)

states, “Recognizing the sacredness of lands on which previous generations have lived and died is the foundation of all other sentiments. Instead of denying this aspect of our lives, we should be setting aside additional places which have transcendent meaning.” The desire to preserve sacred sites remains a primary argument of the DAPL protest and it is reflected in the media.

While treaty rights are a major issue of concern to Indigenous peoples, only 16 out of the 80 articles reviewed mention treaties – *Liberal* (4), *Mainstream* (4), *Conservative* (1), *Local* (1), *Indigenous* (6). Even fewer mention the Fort Laramie Treaties, the contracts most prevalent to the movement. The relationship between Indigenous Americans and the settler government is historically rooted in mistrust. Numerous land dealings have left many Indigenous peoples – specifically, the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota peoples in the context of this study – with a small fraction of what once was an expansive domain. As the U.S. expanded westward, many treaties were signed between tribes and the U.S. with nearly every treaty broken by the Federal government. The Great Sioux Reservation was established by the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 in a desire to end hostilities between Indigenous peoples and settlers (Neville and Anderson 2013). However, the boundaries that reached from the Missouri River, Platte River, Powder River, and Heart River, encompassing 60 million acres, was diminished in the decades to come. Motivated by the desire to acquire land and connect the Great Plains by railroad, the U.S. government eventuated further Indigenous land loss through the Homestead Act of 1862, Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, Allotment Act of 1887, Act of 1889, the Wheeler-Howard Act of 1934, the Pick-Sloan Flood Control Act of 1944, and the Indian Land Consolidation Act of 1983 (Neville and Anderson 2013).

The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 is essential to understand the DAPL protest as it established the boundaries of the Great Sioux Reservation to encompass most of western South Dakota as seen in Figure 7. The area under contestation in the movement was classified as unceded territory, where no settler was permitted to occupy without the consent of the Indigenous peoples, under Article 16 of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. Perhaps the most tragic loss occurred after Congress abolished the treaty system in 1871, paving the way for the Act of 1877 in which the Black Hills region was removed from the Great Sioux Reservation, an Act declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1980 (Neville and Anderson 2013; Brewer

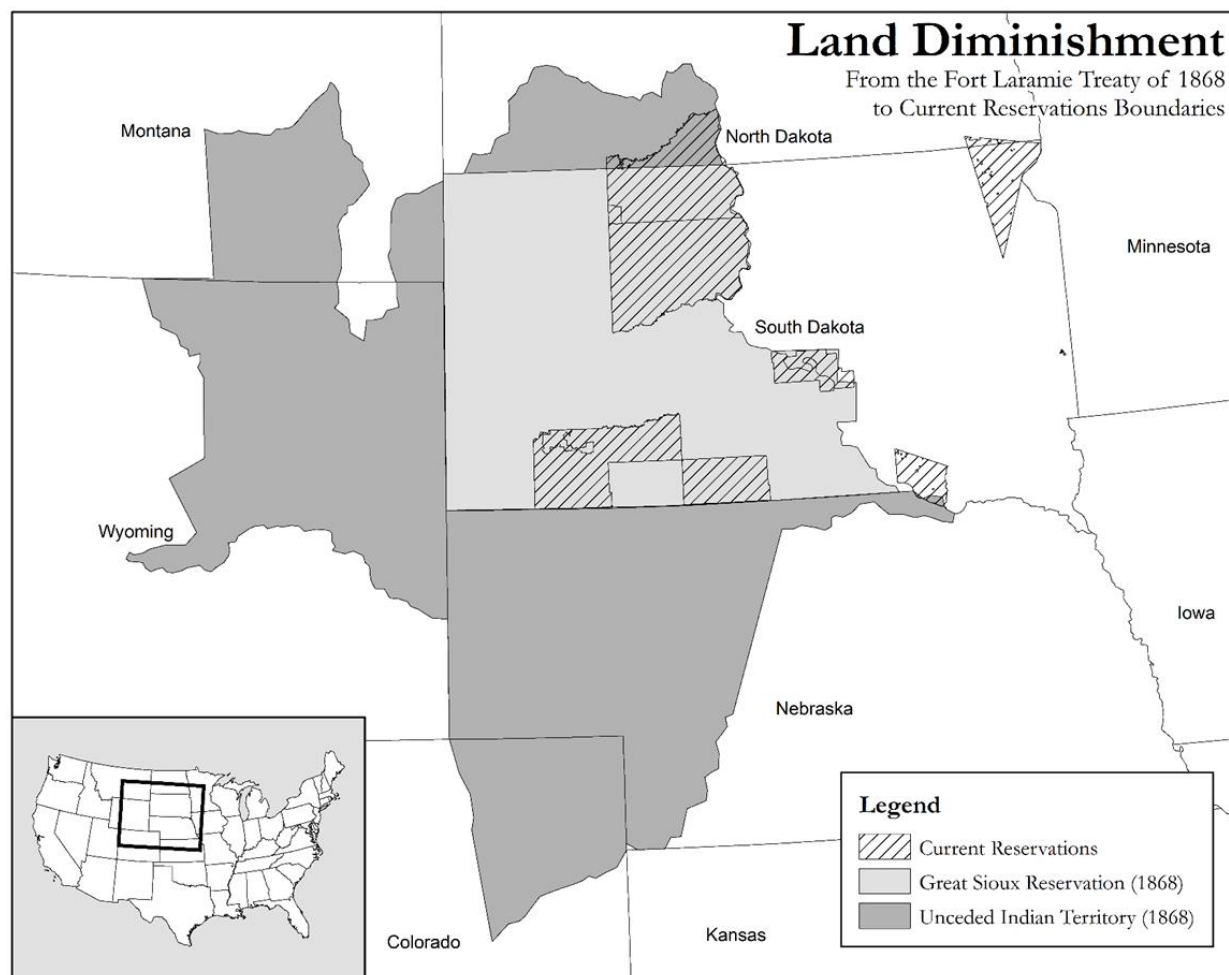


Figure 7: The boundaries of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, including the Great Sioux Reservation and the Unceded Indian Territory, and the current Sioux reservations. Data from U.S. Census Bureau and State Historical Society of North Dakota. Map created by Katie Grote.

and Dennis 2018). In 1887, the United States entered the allotment and assimilation era of federal Indian policy. This allowed for the federal government to open certain reservations to allow “surplus lands” to be sold to settlers or declared to be public domain (Fouberg 2002). As of 2017, less than 6.25 million acres are retained by the Lakota peoples, approximately a 90% decrease from the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1951. Brewer and Dennis (2018) write, “This segmented and forced removal from traditional lands and identities has left individual and collective trauma in its wake.” By inciting the diminishment of land and disconnecting Indigenous peoples from their unique relationships to specific landscapes, the U.S. government has threatened Indigenous identity and has perpetuated a slow violence through colonization (Brewer and Dennis 2018).

Within the context of this analysis, *tribal sovereignty and recognition* primarily refer to the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe’s complaint that they were not adequately consulted about the construction of the pipeline just upstream from the border of their reservation. This is one of two aforementioned reasons for opposition which the *Conservative* media does not cover. The *Indigenous* (5) and *Local* (5) media are the most prolific in covering this topic, followed by *Mainstream* (4) and *Liberal* (2) media. Tribal sovereignty and the ‘nation to nation’ status codified in the U.S. Constitution and upheld by U.S. Supreme Court precedent provide tribes not only with sovereign immunity but also with direct access to Federal agencies tasked with the oversight of environmental protection. When these constitutional protections afforded to tribes impede development though, they frequently come under attack by States and Federal agencies, not to mention the corporations engaged in the development project, as can be seen in the court battles surrounding the Dakota Access Pipeline.

*Economic vulnerability* primarily refers to the lower economic status and marginalization of many of the tribal residents, thus indicating that, if an oil spill were to occur, water contamination would more negatively impact these residents compared to those of a higher economic status. Vulnerability is only mentioned by nine of the 80 reviewed articles, five of which were *Indigenous* news articles and the other four of which were mentioned once in each of the other news categories. This shows that the Indigenous media and its audience are much more concerned with the relation between vulnerability and the construction of the pipeline. According to the 2016 U.S. Census, five out of the twenty most impoverished counties in the U.S. are encompassed by Indigenous reservations in the Dakotas. The Standing Rock reservation is split between North and South Dakota; on the South Dakota side, Corson County has a poverty rate of 39.1% while Sioux County in North Dakota has a poverty rate of 35.3% (Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) Program 2017). Additionally, the death rate can be utilized as an indicator of socioeconomic vulnerability for Indigenous peoples of the Dakotas. According to the U.S. Institutes for Health, Metrics and Evaluation (2019), the all-causes, all-sexes, and age-standardized death rate of Corson County is 1200.22 and Sioux County is 1600.02 per 100,000 deaths. This is compared to the South Dakota and the North Dakota state death rates of 746.69 and 733.71, respectively, and the national death rate of 785.66 per 100,000 deaths. This demonstrates that tribal populations along the path of the pipeline already have a disproportionately high poverty rate, greater socioeconomic vulnerability, and poorer health outcomes.

In the United States and globally, Indigenous communities have already witnessed the early-stage impacts of climate change (Whyte 2017, 2013; Maldonado et al. 2013; Cozzetto et al. 2013). Fossil fuel production will increase with the completion of the Dakota Access Pipeline,

inciting the argument by protectors that the pipeline should be stopped, emissions should be lowered, and anthropogenic climate change should be taken seriously. Despite the time-sensitivity of climate change, it is one of the least cited categories related to opposition against the Dakota Access Pipeline, with only nine articles referring to it. References to climate change occur most often in the *Indigenous* news category and it is also mentioned in the full range of politically biased categories at least once. However, the *Local* news abstained from mentioning climate change entirely. In one of the *Conservative* news articles (Siciliano 2016), climate change policies were portrayed with a negative connotation. The article states, “The AFL-CIO labor federation ... is putting pressure on the Obama administration to build the pipeline, saying...that ‘trying to make climate policy by attacking individual construction projects is neither effective nor fair to the workers involved.’” It is notable though that the article did not actively deny or ignore anthropogenic climate change. The added presence of the discussion on climate change may be more apparent to Indigenous audiences because they are more aware of the impacts. Furthermore, the effects of climate change are amplified by settler colonial policies as territory and resources are limited for tribal communities.

Despite the fact that Indigenous peoples contribute relatively minimally to anthropogenic climate change (Whyte 2013), tribal communities are experiencing accelerate sea level rise, land erosion, and permafrost thaw which in some cases forces them to abandon their already diminished territory (Maldonado et al. 2013). Although anthropogenic climate change will ultimately impact everyone, already marginalized peoples will likely feel the effects first and most heavily (Cozzetto et al. 2013). The Oglala Lakota Nation climate change program’s primary concern is drought and water scarcity, which could cause stresses on agriculture, ranching, and wildlife (Whyte 2017). Furthermore, more severe storms may be a product of

climate change impacting the crop timing and yields as well as forage production. Ceremonies may also be impacted; extreme heat may effect elders and community members practicing seasonal ceremonies and some medicinal plants may also disappear (Whyte 2017). Whyte (2017, 10) states,

For the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, as climate change becomes more apparent in their homelands, shifting plant and animal habitats tied to agriculture, wildlife, and ceremonial species, it will be the loss of territory and resources due to U.S. settler colonialism that will make it harder to adjust.

The legacies of U.S. settler colonialism also limit the resources for adaptation to rapidly changing climates. For example, land diminishment and reservation boundaries mean the tribe may lose access to migrating habitats. Furthermore, the previously mentioned economic vulnerability may also obstruct adaptation.

The *present manifestations of colonial history* category indicates that an article cited an historical event – born out of colonial policies – and then related it to the current oppression of Indigenous peoples as manifested through the pipeline construction. The colonial present is the least referenced of the previously mentioned reasons for opposition. It is the second category which the *Conservative* and *Local* media ignore completely. Comparatively, the *Indigenous* (4) and *Liberal* (3) media claim the bulk of references to colonial history and its repercussions. The concept of the *colonial present* is not only represented in news sources surrounding the movement, scholarly literature also provides insight to this topic. Derek Gregory (2004), author of *The Colonial Present*, observes that historical colonial policies are not relegated to the past but are reflected in modern society, which he refers to as the “colonial present.” The political, military, and economic power of the settler state works in various insidious ways to continually marginalize Indigenous peoples. Historically, settler states have facilitated the land dispossession, cultural suppression, and physical genocide of Indigenous peoples. In the present,



Indigenous peoples often still experience land loss, environmentally racist threats to resource quality and Indigenous health, and colonial amnesia in which the Indigenous experience is forgotten, or ignored, by settler citizens and the state itself. A stark example of environmental racism is the originally proposed route of the Dakota Access Pipeline which would have crossed the Missouri River upstream of Bismarck, North Dakota – the state capital with a majority settler population. This route was rejected due to public concerns of water contamination (Whyte 2017). The privilege of the majority settler Bismarck population allowed them to avoid the potential harm posed by the pipeline while the tribe is subjected to potential environmental harm. Figure 8

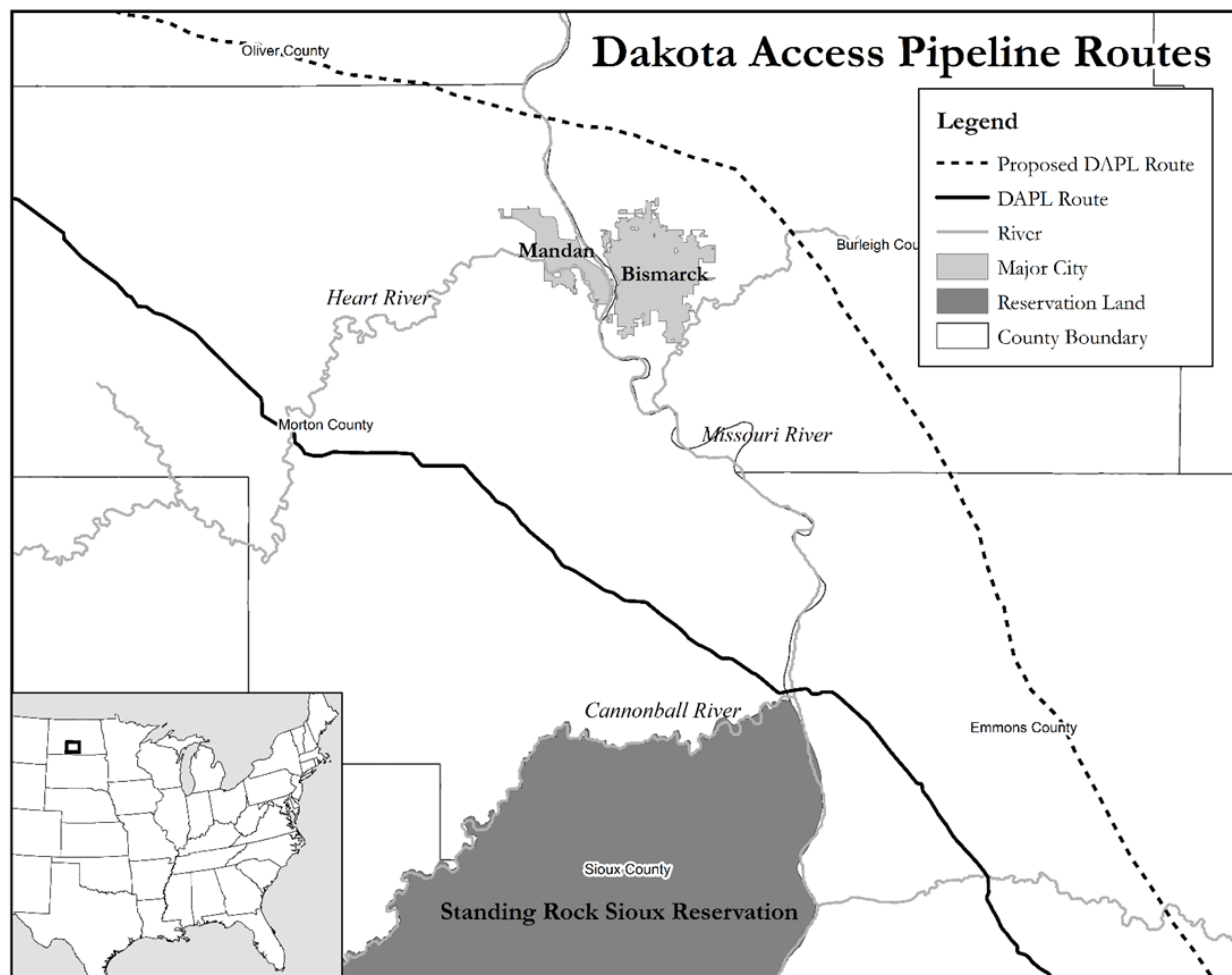


Figure 8: The current and proposed alternative routes of the Dakota Access Pipeline. Data from U.S. Census Bureau and Carl Sack. Map created by Katie Grote.

shows the proposed route as well as the existing route crossing the Missouri River just upstream from the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation.

The colonial present is often connected to capitalist ventures, such as the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. In his book *Red Skin, White Masks*, Glen Sean Coulthard (2014, 77) writes, “Although primitive accumulation no longer appears to require the openly violent dispossession of indigenous communities and their entire land and resource base, it does demand that both remain open for exploitation and capitalist development.” Although, not always directly mentioned in the media representations, it is important to note that the movement encompasses the much larger issue of continued dispossession and exposure to environmental harm by the settler state. Coombes et al. (2012, 818) write, “Indigenous motivations in environmental disputes are connected to broader projects of recognition, reclamation of sovereignty and resistance to northern capitalism; they are not mere resource conflicts.” This resistance has been ongoing in numerous forms for centuries. Historically this resistance took the form of warfare but more recently protests such as those at the Standing Rock are the norm.

### Conclusion

Settler state education molds individuals who are ignorant to the most prominent issues that Indigenous peoples face today. This study uses the resistance against the Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock as an example of how this ignorance of Indigenous issues is perpetuated and exacerbated by the media representations using 22 different news outlets and Otero’s Media Bias Chart. While several of the non-Indigenous news sources had a reasonable understanding of some aspects of the movement, such as the importance of water, and the voice

of the Indigenous peoples of Standing Rock were frequently referenced, the Indigenous media, with its better informed and engaged audience, represents the movement more holistically.

To review, the *Indigenous* media category was, perhaps unsurprisingly, the most representative of Indigenous preferred identification and holistic representation of opposition. This is indicative of a shared experience and empathy of the *Indigenous* media audience. The *Liberal* bias media was the second most representative of Indigenous preferred identification. The *Liberal* media also had a relatively holistic representation of opposition. While the data provided in this research may not be able to answer exactly why the *Liberal* media is more empathetic to the Indigenous-led movement, some insight may be gained from the Democratic National Convention 2016 Party Platform. The platform sites ideas and beliefs that govern the democratic party. The 2016 platform refers to building a clean energy economy, combating climate change, securing environmental justice, and protecting public lands and waters. It also cites removing barriers to opportunities by ending systemic racism and honoring Indigenous tribal nations (“2016 Democratic Party Platform” 2016). These policies are reflected in the issues of the movement and, therefore, result in a more empathetic response to the protest from the *Liberal* media. The *Mainstream* media, generally, held fast to the identification terms not preferred by Indigenous peoples, and coverage coincided with peak events and represented a variety of voices, including Indigenous peoples. There was often a lack of Indigenous preferred identification, Indigenous voice, holistic understanding of opposition, and of coverage from the *Conservative* news publications. Like with the *Liberal* media, an examination of the Republican National Convention 2016 Party Platform mirrors the response of the *Conservative* media to the DAPL protest. The platform cites the desire to extract oil and coal resources in the U.S., by weakening permitting and regulation processes, to promote energy independence and economic

growth (“Republican Platform 2016” 2016). The *Local* media also lacked in understanding Indigenous preferred identification and, to a lesser degree, holistic understanding of opposition. The *Local* media did however have a diversity of voices, including Indigenous ones, as well as a substantial amount of coverage of the movement. Given this, the complexity of the DAPL protest is best understood by the *Indigenous* media and their audience who understand, often through personal experience, the ramifications of colonization, the importance of treaty rights, and the detrimental impacts an oil spill would have on their community’s well-being. Ample coverage may not be enough if there is not a holistic understanding of Indigenous issues and histories; where there is a lack of coverage there is an even greater barrier of understanding and combatting ignorance. This lack of understanding further widens the divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and perpetuates the “othering” of Indigenous peoples.

While the movement had many allies and supporters, it also saw significant opposition from pipeline proponents. The role of media in the dichotomy is important to understand, particularly its lack of persuasion and ability to actually sway audience members from one side of the political spectrum to another. There is widespread evidence that news coverage, particularly currently, is biased toward one political viewpoint – this research utilized Otero’s Media Bias Chart to categorize the outlets covering the protest. The media has the power to frame stories in a way that encourages certain audiences to “think, feel, and decide in a particular way” (Entman 2007, 164). However, the news is not the only culprit of political bias, so are the audiences they reach. While news organizations show bias by allotting more time to one viewpoint or only referencing certain sources that substantiate a particular claim, consumers also perpetuate media bias. Burke (2008, 634) states, “Consumers seek biased news, particularly news that is biased towards their prior beliefs.” For a consumer to change their prior beliefs, it

will take numerous opposing reports to sway their mind. A consumer is not likely to actively seek such reports, particularly in the era of “fake news” and elevated distrust of the increasingly polarized media. Therefore, if the media we consume increasingly solidifies our beliefs, it can be assumed that settler audiences may remain ignorant to issues of profound importance to Indigenous audiences. In order to combat ignorance, we must remain open-minded and truly listen to voices that share a diversity of beliefs and experiences. This article provides a closer look at some of the issues of profound importance to Indigenous peoples, as represented in the DAPL protest. It has, hopefully, enhanced understanding of the movement and provided a modest contribution to the growing academic literature on the DAPL protest.

## Conclusion

In the earliest stages of this research, I embarked on a journey to discover the intricacies of alliances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups for a common cause. With the DAPL protest as a case study, I aimed to learn more about the Indigenous peoples at Standing Rock and the settlers in support of their cause. In my review of the literature, I learned about the benefits and drawbacks of a diverse group of people supporting social movements. For example, while alliances may result in an increased scale of awareness it may also be difficult for the two groups to truly understand their cultural differences. Furthermore, people may support a movement without supporting the same methods of protest or even the same outcome. The methodology that would best accompany this research interest would be semi-structured interviews. However, the timeline of the movement and the timeline of my degree did not align as hoped. The on-ground movement ended while I was still in the preliminary stages of my literature review, and with a lack of contacts and funding, the research soon became beyond the scope of my master's studies.

My solution was to still address the alliances of the movement – I eventually settled on the group of largely non-Indigenous veterans at Standing Rock – but through the lens of the media. While social media was an important platform, particularly for the Indigenous voices of the #NoDAPL movement, scrapping Facebook and Twitter without coding skills was also out of the scope of this project. Instead, I chose to look at the representations of DAPL protest in various news outlets through content and textual analysis – a method I also invoked for my undergraduate thesis research. Change came again after my data was collected. The results were inconsequential. However, the data I collected also told a different, but much more interesting, story about Indigenous and non-Indigenous media perspectives of the movement. Once data

became the driving force, a significant difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous media was found.

In hindsight, there are several things that I would have done differently with this research and will inspire my future research. Although I would like to say that I would want fewer changes in the direction of this project, I understand that this is part of the research journey. Additionally, the various research directions I took allowed me to learn more about the movement as a whole, for which I am grateful. The primary changes I would make would be in my data collection. With the inspiration of the veterans' alliance, my initial data collection – although still guided by Otero's Media Bias Chart (2017) – was for publications and articles that covered the veteran presence at Standing Rock. However, I made note of publications that did not cover the veterans' alliance and returned to these publications after my research became more driven by the timeline. In retrospect, I would try to choose specific publications – guided by the Media Bias Chart, but also by ease of access through interfaces such as ProQuest – prior to my initial data collection. Additionally, I would distribute the publications and number of articles more evenly among the various categories. This may provide more interesting statistical analysis than was available through my initial topically based data collection. While everything can be improved, the outcome of this research is satisfying, and the experience is invaluable. As I advance to my doctoral program my interests still lie with Indigenous geography and social movements. However, in my research on the DAPL protest I have been intrigued by the various calls for an updated Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) of the pipeline project. The role of an EIS in development projects and how they consider, include, and impact Indigenous peoples has sparked my interest. In my future research, I will likely still study the DAPL protest considering

my familiarity with it, however, I may also consider other case studies such as the local Wakarusa Wetlands/South Lawrence Trafficway conflict.



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